h:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

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Chapter XIV

THE KOL TRIBE IN TRANSITION

178 114 It is rather difficult to compare the Kols of today with the Kols of an earlier period. There is no material old enough and complete enough to show the changes that are occurring in Kol life and thought. The best single account of the Kols of Central India is found in Mr. William Crooke's Volumes on *The Tribes and Castes of the N. W. Provinces and Oudh*. This was written some fifty-five years ago, and while it contains something that may be used in a comparative way it is not full enough. Russell and Hiralal's book which is about thirty years old is not specific enough and is based more on general Munda customs than it is on actual Kols in Central India. And yet to use Crooke's account as a criterion of conditions among the Kols of Central India some fifty years ago would not be quite fair, as his account is based largely on the Kols in the southern edge of the United Provinces. Thus he is talking of the Northern Kols. Our investigations have been mainly among the Southern Kols, but we have checked our materials in Rewa State, the centre of Kol distribution. The fairly consistent account of the main outlines of Kol life and experience has led us to believe that we have a fairly accurate account of things as they are today. Nevertheless one senses a great unexplored world of belief, custom and outlook of which but the edge has been touched. No anthropologist would claim finality for any study such as this.

From our discussions with Kols and observations and comparisons there have clearly been changes among them in the economic, social and religious spheres of life.

178 464 Economic Changes. The striking thing from the economic angle is that this tribe, a jungle people originally, is moving away from the forests, first into agricultural centres where they earn their livelihood as farm coolies or tenant farmers, and then on into the industrial world as the factory coolie.

The further the Kols have moved from their jungle life the more industrialized they have become. Kols in Jubbulpore are nearly all engaged in factory work, or some other form of industrial work such as sawyers, and those yet further from Rewa are in manganese mines. [566 221] There are still large groups of Kols who are agricultural serfs and others who follow the wheat crop at the harvesting seasons. Along with other

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

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members of the family able to work they leave their rude huts and then return three or four months later with a bit of money with which to buy clothes and the like. Some of the women accompany them, though not the children, and when they return at the end of the season there are a large number of infants which have been born to them in the fields as they have worked.

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There are three strata among the Kols of today. From the economic view the factory coolies are better off. While wages are not high they are higher than can be won in agricultural or forest work and the income is steady. As forest people and agricultural serfs they may have enough to eat, but no money for anything else. Factory work brings three to four times the wage of the Kol who works away in the villages, and lasts the year round. Everywhere it is said that the Kols are the best group of workmen among those employed and often they are the main workers throughout a factory where unskilled labour is needed. As they are working in the factories they are also learning trades, and fifty years from now it may be found that Kols have taken up many trades and have made good. There is no occupational restriction as with many Hindu castes. [463]

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As the economic level is raised there is usually found a definite improvement in living conditions. Bad as the factory lines are they are much better than the rude huts of the jungle Kols. A Kol in Katni has built for himself a brick house of a very respectable appearance. In order to supplement their farm earnings the agricultural Kols still practise on the side their primitive occupations of wood and grass cutting. The industrial Kols are not able to do this, for they must work daily in the factory unless it happens to be closed on Sunday. On that day it will be found that a few Kols have gone out where wood may be cut and each brings back a load to the factory lines. This is cut for their own use and is not for sale. [313]

Wherever Kols have been settled for some years they have told us how they first came and lived in grass huts and how gradually, as they became sure of their place there and as work became fairly regular and certain, that they have put up better living quarters and finally have built good mud houses with tiled roofs. More is owned by them than they ever had before. They possess livestock and there may be considerable amounts invested in jewellery. [231 454]

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Judging from the pictures in books like Crooke, Russell and Hiralal and Roy's work on the Mundas and other related tribes, the Kols of today in Central India cover their persons with clothes much more completely than the earlier pictures represent. Today one finds but little exposure of the breasts by Kol women, and in the

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

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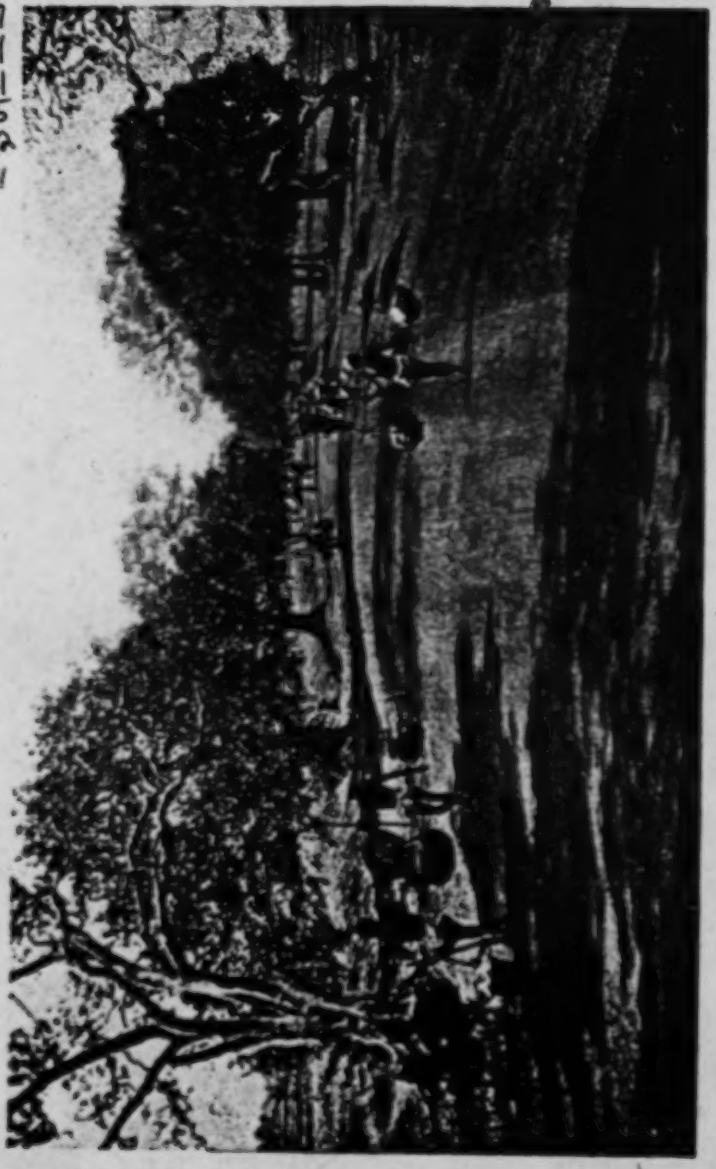

PLATE XXIX

Kols migrating North following the Wheat Harvest.

[facing p. 277]